



## San Jose Greenprint in the Red

Posted by [Pierluigi Oliverio](#) on Monday, September 14, 2009

Since Sept. 7 was the Labor Day holiday, the City did not have a regular city council meeting. So, instead the Council had a “study session” on the Greenprint, which is a vision for our parks and community centers. (It is not a legal binding document.)

Study sessions are sort of like the “News Hour” program on PBS. We spend extra time on one topic where we get a presentation from city staff, and then we ask questions and make statements. Public comment is encouraged; the usual rule of two minutes; however, some community groups write letters in advance to be part of the public record.

The city has grown in square footage both in parks and community centers. However San Jose still ranks lower than many cities in its ratio of parks to people, even when you include school property (which is where I used to play as a kid). By 2020 we will be 1,124 acres short of our goal/vision. In fact, we exacerbate this ratio every week by approving affordable housing that is exempt from park fees or land dedication.

I brought this issue up a year ago at the Rules Committee. However I have been waiting for over a year now for the Housing Department to come back with some options for the Council. By my back-of-the-envelope calculations, San Jose has lost out on approximately \$60-90 million in park fees from housing developers. Actually, this is another question I asked city staff: What is the amount of money the City of San Jose has lost on exempting fees/taxes for affordable housing? But I never heard back—probably since it is a big number.

With the passage of Measure P in the year 2000 with 78 percent voting yes, the city was able to build new community centers, remodel existing community centers and build out park amenities. For example Happy Hollow will open up next year brand new because of Measure P.

Measure P is financed by general obligation bonds. Without Measure P these improvements would be typically funded through the construction and conveyance tax, or if the park/community center was located in a redevelopment area, then possibly diverting RDA money meant for economic development. But without Measure P it is unlikely that much of what has been accomplished would have occurred.

The primary funding of new parks comes through building new housing, since market-rate housing (not affordable) pays park fees or donates land for a new park. So if you do not want any housing then you do not get new parks.

The question is: Would you be willing to vote yes on another Measure P to buy land and possibly construct new trails and parks?

A new Measure P may for example fund the entire completion of our proposed trail system and two new medium-sized parks. It would also provide money to be held in reserve to buy one or two school sites if and when a school district decides to close a school as has been done in the past. Actually we have two great facilities in the Willows Community Center and Kirk Community Center that used to be elementary schools.

Cities get the "first right of refusal" to buy other public-agency owned land. However, if one of these schools was for sale today, San Jose could not buy it because we don't have the money, and it would likely become more housing.

One could counter and say that the way the city delivers park maintenance is too expensive and therefore we cannot provide the ongoing maintenance for existing facilities so lets not add new park acreage. Should a new Measure P be changed to a parcel tax so it provides money for ongoing maintenance that keeps up with the rate of wage-medical-pension inflation? Change the maintenance model? Or would you rather pay more in taxes for police or street paving than parks?

[Here is a link to the Greenprint.](#)

There is a public meeting to discuss this topic Wednesday, Sept. 16 at 6:30pm at City Hall in room W-120.

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